

## Mr. Ford's Page

THE pull of gravitation upon us is mostly felt in the desire to find some routine that will almost run itself, to organize a business that will operate itself automatically and for an indefinite period, to strike a single comfortable rut and to keep it. This is the downpull which men ought to resist, especially in these changeful times when the future is offering itself to foresight, and will be the servant of those who are able to detach themselves from the familiar and adventure with the new.

In the horse age we used to see this tendency represented in animals who were accustomed to a certain daily round. The doctor went to certain houses, and his horse became accustomed to stop there, and would always turn in whether reined in or not. The milkman went his round, and his horse behaved as if displeased if any change was made in the daily program.

Men fall into the same half-alive habit. Seldom does the cobbler take up with the new-fangled way of soleing shoes, and seldom does the artisan willingly take up with new methods in his trade. Habit conduces to a certain inertia, and any disturbance of it affects the mind like a trouble. It will be recalled that when a study was made of shop methods, so that the workman might be taught to produce with less useless motion and fatigue, it was most opposed by the workmen themselves. Though they suspected that it was simply a game to get more out of them, what most irked them was that it interfered with the well-worn grooves in which they moved.

There are business men who are going down with their businesses because they like the old way so well they cannot bring themselves to give it up. One sees them all about—men who do not know that yesterday is past, and who woke up this morning with their last year's ideas.

It could almost be written down as a prescription that when a man begins to think that he has at last found his method, he had better begin a most searching examination of himself to see whether some part of his brain has not gone to sleep. There is a subtle danger in a man thinking that he is "fixed" for life. It indicates that the next jolt of the wheel of progress is going to fling him off.

The only business that has a promise of security is the business whose manager has hardihood enough to change it, even though he may love it ever so much, when his common sense tells him that a change is coming. It is a hard thing to do, but the hard things are usually the right things to do, and a man is better for following his vision instead of his "likes."

And what makes it hard? It will not be hard for the man who comes to do it for the first time—why is it hard for the other? Because he has softened down into the old methods; he has allowed them to mold him, instead of himself molding them; he has become a creature of his method, instead of its controller.

The past has a strong hold on us through its detail. We cannot break with the past, but we can scrape off the clinging seaweed of its details. We can break down the whimpering laziness of mind which resents the intrusion of new methods. We can acknowledge each day as a new day and not a mere repetition of yesterday.

Life is not a "battle" except with our own tendency to sag under the downpull of the habit of "getting settled." If to petrify is success, all one has to do is to humor the lazy side of the mind; but if to grow is success, then one must wake up anew every morning and keep awake all day. Great businesses become but the ghost of a name because some one thought they could be managed just as they were always managed, and though the management may have been most excellent in its day, its excellence consisted in its alertness to its day, and not in slavish following of its yesterdays.

It is not likely there shall ever be many really new things to do, but it is certain that most of the old works shall be performed in a new way. Fundamentally, agriculture will always mean producing foodstuffs and cloth-stuffs from the field; transportation will always mean conveying materials by wheel across the surface of the earth or by bottoms across the surface of the waters; manufacture will always mean armies of men working raw materials into articles of use.

Everything we now point to boastfully as evidences of our progress consists simply in doing some old work in a new way. Most of that progress consists in getting light from filaments instead of tallow, getting wheel-movements from fire instead of ox-muscle. Most of the history of material progress can be written as a story of the successive ways by which wheels have been made go round. There is nothing new except in the way it is done.

Society is always in danger from two classes, those who fear change, and those who crave it. The first class tends toward decay, the second toward destruction. Change is not to be sought for itself alone, but in following to best advantage the obvious beckoning of the times.

There is always something outside ourselves that gives the signal; a motion of advance that comes over the earth like the coming of spring, and those that are alive respond to it; those who prefer to continue their hibernation in the old methods, fall out of step with the advance. They remain comfortable enough, no doubt, but they no longer count.

It pays a man always to have ideas in advance of what he is doing; that is the only valuable capital.

Changes are coming in every field, and the cause of the jagged interval between two periods is men's hesitancy to give up the old and plunge into the new. The old leaves fall to make room for the new. The old methods are suddenly found to be inadequate because new combinations are arriving. The sleepy side of our minds complain that we are being shaken out of our old life; the vividly alive side of our minds would show us, if we would permit it, that we are only being shaken into our new life.

It is not given to every generation to pass through a period of change. Life ran placidly for our forefathers for long stretches at a time, and in the older countries a certain method of life became so fixed that it left century-long

traces on city and countryside. But in these latter days the intervals of change become shorter and shorter. The pace is quickening. Period follows period out of all reckoning with the old calendars. We have seen an almost complete revolution in the past fifteen years, and now we are on the eve of another; and as soon as that will have come, another will be visible on the horizon. The world is moving with breathlessly eager haste to some new position, and we cannot stop it. We can only stop ourselves from following along.

Life is not a location, but a journey. Even the man who most feels himself "settled" is not settled, he is probably sagging back. Everything is in flux, and was meant to be. Life flows, and is not in the same stretch of country for very long. Even the solar universe, we are told, is flying along like a flock of shining birds, always occupying a new position in space. We may live at the same number of the street, but it is never the same man who lives there.

These facts may be resented or welcomed: the man who acknowledges them in a practical way in the form his service takes will always find himself in service; the others will be retired. Finding it hard to give up an incrustated method is a sign of a hardening of the mind which, like the hardening of the arteries, is not to be neglected.

**THE periods between changes become shorter and shorter. Formerly several generations could pass between changes, but now several new periods appear in a single generation. The world is accelerating its pace toward some new position. This requires of men constant readjustment and is hard on those who resent being shaken out of their ruts. There is a natural tendency to sag down, to organize our business so nicely that it will run itself. Nothing runs itself, and nothing can be successfully run the same way for long. Success in the first degree requires foresight of coming changes. Success in the second degree requires a willingness to adjust oneself to changed methods as soon as the signal appears. The comfortable ruts all drain at last into the ditch by the side of the road.**